oh! BROTHER

Melissa Farley Speaks Out About *Changing Men* Magazine

DATE: SEPTEMBER 29, 1992
TO: THE EDITOR OF CHANGING MEN
FROM: MELISSA FARLEY, PHD.

DEAR EDITOR:

I read with great concern Duane Allen's article "An Invitation to Transgressive Sex" in your Issue #24 (Summer/Fall 1992). I see this article as another liberal attempt to depoliticize sexual relationships; to focus on pleasure without an analysis of the power dynamics in sexual behavior. Sex is not separate from the rest of life. Since some of us still consider the personal to also be the political, then the behaviors which Allen advocates **and their consequences** should be analyzed from a feminist perspective.

The article was also of special concern to me because Duane has been my friend and ally. In 1985, we were arrested together for destroying pornography in Beloit, Wisconsin. I agree with him that: creating new forms for relations between women and men, and between women and women, and men and men, that undermine the gender roles to which we have been assigned in patriarchy, is a revolutionary act. But he puts us on notice in the second paragraph that he is "stepping outside of profeminist politics" and indeed he does just that. He dismisses "politically correct" sex and strips the issue of power relations from the discussion of sexuality. He then theoretically hunkers over to the right, joining the pornographers-as-feminists.

Never in the article is "transgressive sex" defined. Is this a tease or what? Maybe it is also a gender-disguising tease that he does not tell us his first name, either. (The article was authored by "D. Allen.") Here's how it looks to me: he is "gender-flipping" women right back to the good old days of being lipsticked, fucked (with penis, dildo, or whatever) and above all on our backs. Allen seems to be coming (pun intended) from a privileged white male position which must of necessity ignore the survival-level discussion of power relationships in sex which women and gay men of color dare not overlook. If he paid attention to these power relations, he might not have such a good time. It might interfere with his belief in sex-as-pleasure-and-pleasure-alone.

What could be more "main vein" than pornography? Allen deliberately obscures the power relations thrust on us by pornography. He so mystifies "transgressive sex" that it took me several readings to unveil the familiar notion of sex as violation permeating the article. When he discusses "subverting the pornographic narrative," he lists the components of pornography as he sees them: "see, make contact, undress, manipulate body parts, cum, part." I analyze what happens in pornography's "space of possibility" differently: see, target, trap, humiliate, threaten, rape, torture, "cum," shatter the other, leave for dead, just to name a few For a profeminist man to neutralize pornography's danger to women (and disempowered gay men) in this manner frightens and enrages me. I wonder: who are my allies in this struggle?

If the power relations stay the same. which rules is he transgressing? Allen seems to think all this is just a game where no one ever gets hurt. When he discusses "denaturalizing fetishized objects" (like leather, muscle, cockrings, and cocks) in erotic play, it doesn't sound like

gender fuck to me, it sounds like mind-fuck. Would putting the leather back on the cow be denaturalizing it as a fetishized object? What he seems to be saying is that you can be a profeminist man and you can participate in exactly the same old sexual oppression if you just have the correct "transgressive consciousness."

Typically ambiguous, he cautions us in passing about the dangers of consensual transgression. He seems to be both cautioning us against and promoting sadistic sexual behavior at the same time. He lists as unacceptable: "deception and (emotional) violence." This is just one place of several in the article where he skirts the issue of physical violence as a real danger to those who are oppressed. It is also where he most transparently exhibits middle class, white male privilege

Despite the rebellious posture, Allen is breaking none of patriarchy's rules. When you read between the lines, he is advocating a reactionary view of sex as violation which is so familiar to us women. What I read here is a coy mystification of the liberal line that sadomasochism is a high form of genderfucking. Call it pleasure, call it transgressive, call it antifeminist, just *don't* call it feminist. *MF*

DATE: NOVEMBER 6, 1992
TO: CHANGING MEN STAFF
FROM: MELISSA FARLEY

I have been informed by Nikki Craft that it is likely that you will choose not to print her remarkable, and in my opinion politically crucial, article in your next issue.

It is not acceptable to me that my letter be printed without *also printing Nikki's article*. Printing my letter might then give readers the impression that you are an organlzatlon open to feedback and criticism from feminist women. I see even the possibility of your censorshlp of Nikki's analysis as deplorable.

If you choose to remain unaccountable, ie to not print Nikki's analysis, I want my letter pulled out of the issue, and my plan is then to self-publish Nikk's article, my letter, and Chuck's letter. Call it resistance to abuse of male power, call it fighting back, just don't call it "bullying." *MF*